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WHAT CLAIM HAS THE MINISTRY

—UPON THE—

YOUNG MEN OF THE CHURCH?

—AND—

WHAT IS A "CALL" TO THE MINISTRY?

A PRIZE ESSAY.

CITY OF WASHINGTON

BY T. S. CHILDS, D.D.,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

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AUTHOR'S REQUEST.

With the deepest conviction that no utterance of Christian truth, no effort in Christian service, can be effective without the seal of the Holy Spirit, the writer would venture to ask of every reader of this little tract, at least one earnest prayer, that it may be blessed in guiding into the Christian ministry many whom *Christ shall call to it*, and in guiding *from* it any who would enter without such call.

The Evangelical Education Society

Of the Protestant Episcopal Church offered $125 for the best essay, of about ten octavo pages, that should set forth the duty of young men of the Church in regard to the Christian ministry; with brief hints as to the nature of a "call" to the ministry. Competition was invited from ministers and laymen of all denominations in this country and in England. The Bishops of Delaware, Ohio and Pennsylvania were the Committee of award. Sixty-three essays were received from Great Britain, Canada and the United States. From these the Committee selected this as best adapted to the object in view, and as entitled to the award.

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THE CLAIMS OF THE MINISTRY UPON THE YOUNG MEN OF THE CHURCH.

PRIZE ESSAY BY T. S. CHILDS, D.D.,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

MY DEAR FRIEND: You ask my judgment in regard to your work in life. You say your attention has been called to the ministry, but you cannot yet see that it is your duty to enter it.

Let me put before you very simply a few considerations that I hope may help you in the decision of this question:

1. You are a Christian, as you trust. As such you are not your own, you are bought with a price. Your time, your talent, your influence, your body and soul, by the most sacred purchase, belong to Christ. This is one of the commonplaces of Christianity, but it is a great fact; it is the starting point of every true Christian life.

2. I may assume that you want to do all the good you can in the world. What is there worth living for, after all, except this? Life is a poor thing if we cannot leave the world the better for our having been in it. Here the Master is our example. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many. There is nothing higher for the disciple than to be as his Master, nothing better for the servant than to be as his Lord.

3. You have but one life. What you do for Christ and the world you must do now. You cannot come back to cor-

rect mistakes. And it is a terrible mistake to make a mistake of life. No worldly success can balance it. If the great end of life is missed, life itself is a tragic failure.

4. Your one life is a short one. Your decision must be made soon, and the work to be done under it must be done soon. There are few more impressive thoughts than the shortness of the time in which the most weighty and solem responsibilities of life are compressed, and in which they must be met.

5. I should fail in the full force of these suggestions if I did not remind you that the only light in which you can safely settle this question is the light of the final judgment. In the mists and questionings of this generation we are in danger of overlooking the great realities of the future. But if Christianity has any truth at all, it has this: In all the scenes of the present it points us forward, calmly, ceaselessly, to the hour—not far off—when we must each give an account for the one talent or the five; and when the eternal issue will be the doom of the servant who hid his Lord's money, or the "well-done" of the good and faithful.

Now with these considerations, I do not affirm that it is your duty to enter the ministry. I cannot take that responsibility. That must be settled between yourself and God. And I admit fully that he does not call every Christian young man to this work. He has other fields of service in which he needs his followers. But what I say is this: You are called to *examine the question*, honestly, candidly, and with sincere prayer that God will show you His will. You are called to study the field, to judge fairly of your own qualifications, to observe the Providences of God, to seek the guidance and to watch the influences of the Divine Spirit upon your mind in reference to this greatest of questions that can concern you except that of your own salvation. Whatever the result, even if the inquiry should satisfy you that the ministry is not your calling, it will be a great

comfort to you, in the hour when you will need comfort, that you did not refuse to examine the subject faithfully and concientiously.

Now, omitting all discussion of the need of the Christian ministry in general—for we shall agree in this—let me set before you the special need of an *increase* of that ministry. And here your question must first be met. It is a fair question, and in view of the facts, a natural one: "Is not the ministry already full? Are there not many in it who are reduced to the most humiliating straits to obtain places, and many who are quite unoccupied? Where is the evidence of a need of any addition, for the present at least, to the ranks of the ministry?" I admit the force of the question. I am not surprised that you, and many with you, are stumbled by it. As far as our own country is concerned, the facts do seem to present a formidable objection to my plea. Let us look them in the face. If they shall suggest that the want is not so much *more* men, as it is *different* men from those of us who are now in the field, men with more spiritual power, more consecration, more simple devotion to Christ through a greater fulness of the Holy Spirit, it will not be a useless suggestion.

The population of our country is something over 50,000,000. For this number we have, according to the latest official publications, and the most reliable estimates, not less than 120,000 ministers of religion of all kinds. This gives one minister for every 417 of the population. Deducting the Methodist "local preachers," Roman Catholic and Mormon priests, and all non-evangelical ministers, we have left over 70,000 who would be classed as teaching a Christianity more or less evangelical. We still have, therefore, one evangelical minister for every 714 of the population. But suppose we reduce the number still more. Let us assume that 20,000 of the 70,000 are disabled, or retired from the active work of the ministry, or disqualified in some way; we still have over 50,000

evangelical preachers of the gospel in the land. In other words, after this heavy reduction, we have one minister to every thousand of the population young and old, Protestant, Romish, Mormon and infidel. This would seem a large supply. At least it would not indicate any perilous dearth in the ministry at present. Whatever grave defects may exist as to their distribution, the country, as a whole, is better supplied with ministers—almost three to one—than it was at the opening of the century. This is one side of the case. Let us look upon the other.

In the year 1800 the population of the country was 5,308,483. Of this number it is estimated there were 365,000 communicants in the evangelical churches. This would leave 4,943,483 outside that communion. In 1850 the population was 23,191,876, of which 3,529,988 were reckoned as evangelical communicants, giving 19,661,888 outside that communion. In 1880, the population was 50,155,783 of which the evangelical communicants were 10,065,953 leaving 40,089,830 beyond the pale of evangelical Christian communion. That is, in round numbers, there are 20,000,000 more souls to be gathered into the communion of the evangelical churches in our land now than there were in 1850; and 35,000,000 more than in 1800. In other words *there are more than seven times as many outside the communion of the evangelical church in our land to-day as the whole population of the country eighty years ago.* These facts bear their own testimony. They indicate, with sufficient clearness and solemnity, that the work of the Christian ministry in our country is not done; the whitened harvest is not yet reaped.

But you cannot well decide the question if you confine your view to our own land and its wants. This is a small fragment of the great domain of Christian effort. The field is the world. He who is willing to listen to the Master's call cannot take in his view, less than this. If the apparent contradiction of facts in our own land staggers you, here are facts appallingly simple and clear.

In the year 1800, the common estimates rarely placed the population of the world as high as 800,000,000. Let us suppose it even 1,000,000,000—an estimate that would usually be considered extravagant. Of this 1,000,000,000, it is claimed that there were 200,000,000 Christians of all kinds, Greek, Romish and Protestant. This leaves 800,000,000 of the non-Christian population of the world in 1800. The present population is reckoned, by the highest authorities, at about 1,400,000,000. Of these, 400,000,000 are claimed as nominal Christians. Suppose these to be all true Christians—and none will claim that—we have 1,000,000,000 yet unsaved. That is, *there are 200,000,000 more souls to be reached and rescued by the Gospel than there were eighty years ago!* The *increase* during this century, of the field of work for the ministry, is equal to that of four entire nations each as large as the United States. If we adopt a lower, and perhaps more reasonable estimate of population for 1800, the conclusion becomes yet more startling. Does any man ask whether there is still work for the Christian ministry? "Go teach all nations." The command is as imperative as when it was given. It is more urgent and more impressive, by the vastly greater work yet to be done, the mightier mass that wait to receive its benediction.

But even this does not present the call in all its urgency. If we consider it in reference to our evangelical Protestant Christianity, of the 400,000,000 nominal Christians, Protestantism can hardly claim more than 120,000,000, at the most. When from this body you have deducted those whose adherence to Protestanism is only nominal, or accidental, and those who have no sympathy with it as a personal, spiritual faith, it would be a generous allowance that would grant us 50,000,000 as a vital working force of Christian life in the mass of humanity. Against this we have more than 800,000,000 heathen, 150,000,000 Mohammedans, with the added millions of Jews, infidels and unbelievers. And yet the command stands: "Preach the Gos-

pel to every creature." Surely, if there is anything in the world's bitter *need* of the Gospel to constitute a call to preach it, you have it here. The field is vast enough, and the want terrible enough, to claim the consecrated talent and power of the strongest and best men the Church has to give.

Let us look for a moment at the provision the churches of our land are making to meet this want. The 115 evangelical Theological Seminaries of the country reported for 1883, 3,817 students. Suppose these to be all in the ministry to-day, and all to claim the apostolic honor and grace of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles and the non-Christian nations, every man of them could have a parish of over 250,000 souls. No, the ministry is not yet full. There is work enough, and there is motive enough, to every man who is willing to hear the Master's voice. The appalling need and the eternal peril of the 1,000,000,000 souls yet unreached by the Gospel are a plea to whose power and pathos words can add nothing. Sure I am, that if you shall have heard and listened to that plea, when your work here is done, life will have been found by you well worth the living.

There are other pleas that I can only suggest. It is not the lost alone that need the ministry; it is not for these alone that the ministry is given. The saved need it as well; and our view comes far short of the truth if it does not take in this field of service. Every Christian needs the Christian ministry. The strongest souls need the constant strength of the word, the ordinances, the sacraments. The young and the old, the doubting and the troubled, the burdened and weary, the sorrowful and suffering—what countless multitudes—are ever needing the tender and faithful ministries of the Christian pastor and guide. The hidden griefs and trials of God's children give a great and wonderful field for the best work of the Christian minister; and I doubt if there is any work in which he comes nearer to his Master, or is dearer to God. A Christian ministry is demanded by the Christian

Church perpetually; and if the whole world were converted to-day we should need a thousand evangelical pastors for every hundred that we have now. We should need them to save the Church herself from confusion, disaster and wreck.

There is another plea, which to a thoughtful, earnest and ingenuous mind must have weight. I mean that drawn from the claims of Christian patriotism. Our country needs intensely and speedily, the permeating power of Christian morality. Nothing else can save us. No greater boon can be given to any land than a faithful, godly, Christian ministry. No greater catastrophe can overtake any land than the loss of such a ministry. The future of our country is bound up more potently with the character of its ministers than with that of its political leaders. The questions that are touching to the quick both Church and State, and whose decision will settle so largely the destiny of the nation, give to the pulpit a more magnificent field of thought and utterance than any in the whole domain of mere political life. The very existence of a personal God on whom men and nations are dependent and to whom they are responsible, a law of righteousness binding individuals and empires, the sacredness of the family and of the Sabbath, with the supreme themes of human ruin and divine salvation, a lost world and an incarnate God, the Cross, the Resurrection, a life in Christ purified here and glorified hereafter, out of Christ a death whose measure is eternity—and you have a sphere of subjects and motives that tax the final reaches of the human intellect, and the profoundest emotions of the human heart.

There is one more plea, the greatest and the last. I mean *the glory of Christ.* As a Christian, this is the end of your life whether in the ministry or out of it. But peculiarly and emphatically is this the end of the ministry. *It is a lost life that does not bring glory to Christ;* it is the most successful life that glorifies Him most. The success or the

failure of His own work—if we dare speak of failure—He has been pleased to bind up with the preaching of the Gospel. As far as that fails, salvation fails; the success of that is the success of His mission. He as well as the world waits for the issue. He waits for the joy that was set before Him; He waits to see of the travail of His soul that He may be satisfied. This is the mightiest plea of the Christian ministry, and the most hopeful. He who goes to his work under it does not go at a peradventure. He works on the line with the Holy Spirit whose seal is the only hope of the ministry, and whose office is to glorify Christ. He works consciously *with* God as well as *for* God. His work cannot be a failure, nor can his reward. Whatever the immediate issue, his ministry shall be "a sweet savor unto God, both in them that are saved and in them that perish." And when his work is done he can say, as Luther did upon his death-bed: "Thee, O Lord, have I known; thee have I loved; thee have I taught; thee have I trusted; and now into thy hands I commend my spirit."

A CALL TO THE MINISTRY.

I must notice briefly, your further question: "What is a 'call' to the ministry?" The question is one of a good deal of difficulty and delicacy, and we need a divine guidance in undertaking to answer it. With a deep sense of this, let me indicate a few points that seem suggested by the very nature of the subject. Obviously, a call to the ministry involves those general gifts that the character of the work demands—*real piety* above all, a good mind, well balanced, and a reasonable amount of health. A brilliant intellect, however desirable, is not essential; nor is great physical vigor, though the more of this the better; but it is wonderful what men of feeble constitutions have done for Christ and His Church; as witness, Henry Martyn and David Brainard. With these qualifications must be, of course, the requisite education, or the opportunity of securing it. The

judgment of wise and judicious friends, as teachers and pastors, is to be considered. But they must be *judicious* friends. Great mistakes have been made and great injury done to the Church and to young men themselves by the counsel of partial parents, unwise pastors, easy and amiable teachers. The act of putting a young man into the sacred ministry is too serious, it involves too many and too solemn interests, to be submitted to anything but the most intelligent and faithful Christian judgment.

But these are, after all, only the externals of the call. There must be something more than all this. The first question put to one who presents himself for the ministry of the Protestant Episcopal Church is this: "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministration?" If I do not err, this points to the *decisive* element in a call to the Christian ministry. A man may have all other qualifications, but if he has not this, he will be a failure. He must be so, and worse. He must be a sacrilegious intruder into the most sacred office, a profaner of the most holy mysteries. One of the most distinguished preachers and teachers of the American Church used to say to his students, as reported, that no man ought to go out as a foreign missionary whose conscience would let him stay at home. I believe the principle extends to the entire ministry. I would say that no man should be in it who can stay out of it with a clear conscience; but no man can stay out of it with a clear conscience *if the Spirit calls him to it.* There will be an inward impression, a strong conviction, that he *ought* to preach the Gospel, a spiritual pressure that he cannot resist without a struggle. He will know the "woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel." I think I am not alone in being deeply and growingly impressed with the conviction that *the weakness and peril of the Church is in an uncalled ministry.* Certainly we need more ministers, but far more than this, we need ministers full of the Holy Ghost and of power.

We need those on whom the seal of God is set. One such man is more effective than a hundred without this. The strength of the Church and of the ministry is simply the strength of the Holy Spirit. It is useless to multiply our ministers if we cannot increase their spiritual power. You cannot give too much weight to this. Enter the ministry, by all means, if God shall call you, but see to it that you are "inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost." It was wise counsel, that of an honored clergyman, on his death bed, in the city of New York, to his only son: "If you are prepared for it, my wish is that you preach the Gospel. It is the *greatest* work and the *best* work. *But beware of becoming a minister unless you are prepared for it.*" It was the calm and solemn judgment of the devoted Legh Richmond that "he would rather follow his son to the grave than see him in the Church without being fitted for such a sacred office."

In a divine call to the ministry there is, I suppose, not only a conviction that one ought to preach, and a desire to preach; it is a specific desire to preach the *truth of God.* The Christian minister is called to preach Christian truth and it is safe to say that no man is called by the Spirit to preach His truth to whom He has not taught that truth. A man who is in a state of mind to cavil with the word of God, to trifle with its truths, to explain away its teachings, or who is ignorant of those truths, is surely not called by the Spirit to teach them to others. *"He whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God."*

Still more specific, I think, in such a call, is the desire to preach *Christ.* General interest in the Scriptures is not enough. A man may be deeply interested in the literary beauties of the Bible, its history, its poetry, its prophecy; he may be exceptionally skilful in its exegesis and learned in its doctrines, and yet have no call to the Gospel ministry. The heart of all the work of the ministry, as the heart of all Christian thought, is Christ. We may be sure that the

Spirit whose office is to take of the things of Christ and show them, does not call any man to the ministry of Christ to whom he does not show Christ as the centre of all Christian teaching.

I will go a step further, and say there must be a desire to preach Christ *crucified.* This was the great object of the Apostle's knowledge, and the end of his ambition. The Christian ministry cannot safely have a less or another object. Christ crucified, Christ as the atoning sacrifice for sin—this, sealed by the Spirit, is the world's last hope, its only hope. The preaching of this is the *great* work, and comparatively the *only* work of the Gospel ministry. The man who does not feel called to this; who has no strong desire to preach a crucified Christ to a lost world; whose heart has not so found and felt the Cross as his own great hope and consolation that he *must* speak of it to others, can hardly have valid evidence of a call to the Christian ministry. This involves that the preacher believes that the world is lost without Christ. He came to seek and to save the lost. His mission was to them. His Gospel is for them. No man can preach Christ who does not preach Him as a Saviour for sinners. No man can preach Him fully and faithfully who does not believe in the terrible nature and doom of sin, from which there is no other name than the name of Christ by which men must be saved.

With this conviction, there will be, I think, to one called by the Holy Spirit, a willingness and a readiness to be *wholly given to the work of the ministry.* The Spirit never calls a man with a reservation. It is to be feared that there is often a sad mistake here. Young men enter the ministry with other aims and ambitions; for literary leisure and fame; as a preparation for professorships or official station, or some work to which preaching shall be a mere adjunct; or as a means of support. Such a man can hardly look for success in the ministry. In this greatest of all works there can be no divided interest or divided heart. "Give

thyself *wholly*" to these things, is the charge of the Spirit to him who deals with the high mysteries of the ministration of life. The man who does this cannot make a failure either of his work or of his reward. Whatever may be the immediate issue, the final result is sure. "Without doubt," says good old Thomas Brooks, "those ministers shall be high in heaven who make it their heaven to hold forth Christ, and to win souls to Christ; who are willing to be *anything*, to be *nothing*, that Christ may be all in all to poor souls."

In the Register of the officers and graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point, under the record of 1839, is the name of "M. S. Culbertson," followed by the words: "Died August 25, 1862, at Shanghai, China, aged 44." It is a brief record, but there is a history behind it. Young Culbertson was a man of superior promise. After his graduation and a brief service in the army, he was appointed assistant professor in the Academy. His prospects for the future were as bright, perhaps, as those of any man who ever left the institution. But the prayers of a godly mother were behind him, and a higher call was upon him. He resigned his position in the army, studied for the ministry, and went out one of an early and noble band of missionaries to China. In the Taeping rebellion his military knowledge and skill enabled him to protect successfully the American interests at Shanghai, and drew from the American Minister to China the enthusisastic remark: "Culbertson, if you were at home you might be a Major-General." "No doubt," he replied, "I might. Men I drilled are in that position;" and he named them—Sherman, Van Vliet Tower, Thomas, Newton, Rosecrans—and he might have added, Lyon, Reynolds and Grant. "But," he said, earnestly, "*I would not change places with one of them. I consider that there is no post of influence on earth equal to that of a man who is permitted to preach the Gospel to four hundred millions of his fellow-men.*" Soon after he fell at his post,

dying unknown by his country, unhonored beyond the little circle that knew his work and his worth. His comrades and pupils live crowned with a nation's honors, or have died to be remembered by a nation's gratitude and veneration. And is this the end? No! History is not yet finished; the account has not yet been made up; the final decision has not been rendered. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightest of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever." May this, my brother, be your work and your reward.

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